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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

wears better than any. But these last three books are rather a disappointment. The poet seems to be tired, as if he were forcing himself to write. He produces in such quantities that the reader grows fatigued and bewildered. Three books in a year; twenty-five books in twenty years; rather an overpowering output! So many of these recent poems are merely pleasant words; so few are really stirring; none have any "evidences of immortality." There is no need for quotation. Everyone has read something of Paul Fort; well, he has just done the same thing over again.

This review, although concerned only with acknowledged writers, will probably seem pessimistic. André Spire's pre-war poems seem to me the best of the lot; the rest are all *distracts*, weary, without energy. These men have nothing new to say, and the war seems to have brought them only disillusion and bitterness. What the next months will bring from France one cannot tell, but in spite of many signs of activity there appears to be little worthy of the tradition of French literature.

Richard Aldington

BENET AND THE ZODIAC

The Burglar of the Zodiac, by William Rose Benét. Yale University Press.

Among American poets, Mr. Benét has a genre all his own: he is a prestidigitator making magic with unfailing precision and adroitness. His readers sit in the audience immensely entertained, "pretending" as docilely as a child that

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the show going on before them is not play-acting but reality. And, just as the prestidigitator's magic of cards and mirrors and colored veils is symbolic of the huge inexplicable magic of the universe, so one may infer large meanings, tragic dignities, behind this poet's tossing of balls and waving of gay-colored scarfs.

He knows there are dark pits and flashing heights, but he does not dare look into them, for that way madness lies. "Blake was mad, they say," he confesses:

I, they say, am sane, but no key of mine unlocks
One lock of one gate wherethrough heaven's glory is freed.
And I stand and hold my breath, daylong, yearlong,
Out of comfort and easy dreaming evermore starting awake.
Yearning beyond all sanity for some echo of that Song
Of Songs that was sung to the soul of the madman, Blake.

"Comfort and easy dreaming"—that is what one finds in this book, in all Mr. Benét's books. It is

A wraith-like script that curiously
Seemed to write "Romance" when its seething glitter ate
Into the dark.

The book writes "Romance" on everything—on the quick-lunch counter, the movies, cowboy riders, city smoke, sky-scrapers, Sunday holidays; it ties them up to Haroun-al-Raschid, Pegasus, Jaldabaoth, and all the other creatures of dream who, of course, are not more wildly incredible. Rarely does the poet stop to think or even to question—why should he when just ahead,

I'll open my eyes on a flashing horn
And see the Unicorn!

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He even scorns his cynic neighbor at the movies who, cold to "these obvious heart-throbs" of the crowd, rages at them and

Their maudlin mess of hopes and fears,
Blind to all proud insurgent art
And the subtle nobilities of the heart.

The poet answers:

Here is the pith of all budded theme,
Man's glamorous fundamental dream.

Not quite "man's fundamental dream" is revealed in this book. Whatever the poet suspects in regard to the voyage, he is content to stay safely ashore and send out paper boats. But some of these are iridescent in the sunlight, and sail away bravely. *The Singing Skyscrapers* should be quoted entire, for although New York is gathering a large anthology, this poem is the most spectacular tribute of all to

The city that is Heaven,
The city that is Hell.

The poet hears them all singing—the Flatiron, the Metropolitan, the Singer Building, the Woolworth tower:

Ninevah they sang,
New York they sang!
In surcoats of stone,
Like huge knights at vigil,
Each alone
Sealed with the sigil
Of the glories of the Throne
That wakes this Memnonian
Music eternal
In the clay and the compost,
The steel, the stone.

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Probably this poem was written before the erection of the most beautiful tower in New York, that of the Bush Terminal Building on West Forty-first street. But that deserves a poem all its own, and Carl Sandburg—let us whisper the news—has written it.

As "the burglar of the zodiac," Mr. Benét has made a rattling good haul. H. M.

CLEMENT WOOD'S NEW BOOK

The Earth Turns South, by Clement Wood. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Mr. Wood's poetry is never fierce, though the paper wrapper of the book proclaims him "fiercely fond of this blossoming earth of ours." His is a placid and reflective muse, pleasant, philosophical, sometimes prosy; but never violent. He is an optimistic poet, a gentleman and scholar, not one of those haunted souls who are so bewitched by beauty and mystery that they are "like to die of it." *The Earth Turns South* makes a varied offering of love poems, nature poems, philosophical poems, and some for which I can find no other adjective than "cosmic." These are the slowest reading. There are some charming lyrics, and I find Mr. Wood at his best when he sings simple songs in rhyme. He has a delicacy of feeling fitted for such expression, but his emotion is spread too thin when it covers the entire astronomical universe. It was startling to find so enchanting a love poem as *The Silver Way* hidden among so many poems which though dignified and thoughtful, are hardly stimulat-